Vaudeville
Messiah
Andreas Gripp

Vaudeville Messiah

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Vaudeville Messiah

Andreas Gripp

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CANADA

Vaudeville Messiah
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NOTES

Title: *Vaudeville* was a theatrical genre of variety entertainment begun in France during the latter 19th century. A Vaudeville was originally a comedy without psychological or moral intentions; a dramatic composition or light poetry, interspersed with songs, burlesque, and dances. It became popular in the United States and Canada from the early 1880s until the early 1930s. The Great Depression and the advent of talking pictures signalled the end of Vaudeville

p. 12 **Hypocrisy**:
Canadian Club is a brand of Canadian whiskey

p. 23 **Tatiana**:
A *pillbug* is a wood louse found under stone and in wet soil that has a thick cuticle and is able to roll up into a ball when threatened

p. 30 **The Jingle**: *Ben* is a 1972 sequel to *Willard*, about an army of rats which terrorize Los Angeles

p. 31-33 **Ashkenazi**: The *Ashkenazi* are a Jewish people who settled in central and eastern Europe in the centuries following the diaspora of 70 AD

88 is sometimes used by the far right to symbolize *Heil Hitler*

A *tallit* is a fringed shawl worn by Jewish people during prayer

A *keffiyeh* is a headdress or a scarf worn most prominently by Palestinians as a sign for their liberation

The German word *Edelweiss,* which is a flower that grows in the Alps, is a combination of *edel* which means noble, and *weiss* which means white

A *knish* is a traditional Ashkenazi Jewish snack made up of a filling covered with dough

Swastika, Ontario, is a town of 500 people

A *schirmmütze* is a peaked hat worn by the German SS

A *kippah* is synonymous with a yarmulke/yamaka

The *Magen David* is the six-pointed Star of David

Latkes are a potato pancake in Ashkenazi cuisine

p. 34 **Charades**: *Sour Patch Kids* are a brand of soft candy

p. 37 **The Automaton**: A *CAPTCHA* is a program or system intended to distinguish human from machine input, typically as a way of thwarting spam and automated extraction of data from websites

p. 46 **Noah, at St. Francis**: *Jabalya* is a city in Palestine, 4 km north of Gaza City

Kettle Point, also known as Wiiwkwedong, is part of the Anishinabek Nation. Kettle Point is unceded territory located in southwestern Ontario along the south shore of Lake Huron. Its people are officially known as the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point. Stony Point is known as Aazhoodena

p. 60 **Iran**: *Khorramābād* is a city in the Lorestan province in western Iran

p. 62-63 **Aspalathus Linearis**: *Aspalathus Linearis* is a leguminous plant endemic to the fynbos region of South Africa

Rooibos (pronounced roy-bows with a hard s) is Dutch for *red bush* and the name of a red tea

p. 69 **The Year That Doesn't Count**: *Machu Picchu* is an Inca citadel set high in the Andes Mountains in Peru, above the Urubamba River valley. It was built in the 15th century

p. 72-75 **Gavrilo Princip and the Gift that Keeps on Giving**: *Gavrilo Princip* was a Bosnian Serb student who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife Sophie, Duchess von Hohenberg, in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. This is the key event which led to the outbreak of war in Europe on July 28, 1914

The *Archean* Eon is a geological time period on Earth that began 4 billion years ago and lasted until about 2.5 billion years ago. The first single-celled life emerged and it's theorized that comets may have delivered crucial organic compounds, considered the building blocks of life, during collisions

The Battle of *Passchendaele* was fought in 1917 in northwest Belgium. Over 4,000 Canadians were killed and another 12,000 wounded. Overall, up to 600,000 soldiers were listed as either wounded or killed

Bergen-Belsen was a Nazi concentration camp in northern Germany during World War II in which over 70,000 people, mostly Jews, were put to death, including Anne Frank and her sister Margot

for Carrie

A
A

***69**

Doorbell rings it's the FBI
We learned Spy vs. Spy
You, my friend, are guilty as can be
I know you called
—REM, *Star 69*

My childhood ceased
abruptly
with the star of sixty-
nine. A sun in super-
nova as we slept;

Nicky's knuckles
much too *bruised*
to rap on knowing
doors. Never suspecting
the camera by the
buzzer—just a fake.
Like some gadget
from an issue
of MAD.

No more Devil's
Night,

spritzing from a can
upon a window,
a dozen broken *eggs*
in a public
mail slot, back in the
heady days
we still *wrote* letters,
anonymous
to our crush,

or doling out
the dollars—on flowers
in a vase,
when I wasn't even
trying to be funny,
red-faced
on *Valentine's,*
sensing that she knew.

The pizza place
grew wise to
our wily ways,

quadruple anchovies
please, the man on the
lighted porch
that smelt of fish,
spotting us
in the bushes,
then running for our lives.

Just once
I wished
the gag had actually
worked: someone *falling*
for the ruse
the final time—their handset
dropped & dangling,
like a banana
from its coil,

a fridge
forever dashing
to the ambit,
feet in hot
pursuit.

Vaudeville Messiah

Video Killed the Radio Star
—The Buggles

It happens all the time—
cassettes were the death of
vinyl. Streaming slayed CDs.
And records pull a Lazarus

after the stone is rolled away.

We only loved the Twins
upon their crumble. Our
mother upon cessation
of her breath.

They say the Great
Depression
was indeed its
dénouement,
though talkies
and Marconi
tilled its grave.

There are things you can
never get back, no matter
the pull of your will:

I will juggle grapes,
pluck them one-
by-one, while the bunches
do a ferris wheel
above my magic hat.

Look below its brim—
an eagle in lieu
of a dove; a lion in
place of a hare, its mane of
golden flame, a hoop
through which to leap.

And if this *fails*
to be enough to
bring it back, I'll snap
the worn suspenders
which are snaked
about my shoulders,

soft-shoe à la
Franco the Drunken
Clown, whom no one
ever heard of,

and if they had,
they'd see he offered *twice*
the tricks as me,
his nose of red, afire,
swelling like Antares,
swallowing up the
curtains
before we've had the
chance to cheer;

that neither
David Copperfields
could ever pull it off—

the one whose
Lady Liberty
disappeared,

the other from Dickens'
novel, swathed in industrial
soot, walking stick
aglow, joining
Ziegfeld Follies
at its peak, dancing
on the stage
like only a dead man
possibly can.

Zoomers

You texted
I got layed
again last night,

with *Sam,*

maybe Samuel,
perhaps Samantha,
the gender doesn't
matter to this poem,

expecting my
applause, the popped
champagne emoji,

expecting I stay *silent*
to your unfortunate
misspelled laid.

Layed is not a
standard English word,
AI's overview
tells me,

and I'm embarrassed
I had to check,
worried *someone* will scour
my search on google chrome,
think that I'm an imbecile,

a neophyte—
who doesn't know the
rules of composition,

or maybe it's even *worse,*
failing to keep on up
with the newest slang,
the greatest
night of sex
one could ever imagine;

while I remain
an awkward *child,*
homely with gangly
arms, nose inside a book
like any egghead,

a virginal
Humpty Dumpty,
laid out on the ground
amid the yolk, never to have
a dozen *progeny,* sitting
upon the wall, mingling
with the horses, one day
take a *shine*
to all the king's men.

Hypocrisy

Seems like everything you
say is *pot meet kettle.*
Just a clichéd way
to call me *hypocrite.*

When I told you
that it's time
to ditch your gossip
magazines, you countered
pot meet kettle. I've a
hundred sets of comics
from my boyhood.
Taking too much *space*
inside the closet. The one
with all your shoes.

Who needs *twenty* open-
toed, especially when it's
winter? But my runners
have been ravaged
from the slush, tearing
at the sides

like a whale upon a
boat, split along its
middle, becoming
the very thing
which I despise. Yes-yes,
yet another *pot meet kettle.*
I shouldn't have signed
the petition, since I dine
on netted fish.

Now here I am again,
critical of your
latest shopping jaunt.
Pot meet fucking kettle
you respond. Sure,
I spent a trifecta
of fifties
on that giant *Canadian*
Club, the kind you shove
like a swing, mounted
on its stand until it's
empty. The deposit's
only 50 shitty cents.

So I'll store it
like the gift that
ever-gives.

You could have used the
money for our dinners,
the kind in a single vessel
you convey, stovetop
set to medium,
creeping up to high
before its climax,
the whistling squeal
beside it
announcing it's time for
evening tea,
that chai and Irish stew
are being served, the kind
that's from a can,

that tonight I'll spend
an hour at the sink,
scrubbing all the black
that's on their bottoms,

burnt as if toasted
bread, the kind I scrape
with a knife, that your kettle
and my pot
are like a pair of bickering
brothers,

who've sauntered
through the hallway
from the mud, both of whom
are piping like a steamship,
their fingers pointed sharply
as though they're pistols,
or that tired, Spider-Man
meme in which there's *three,*
each one blaming the
other
for another mess.

Shells

Can't you hear the Atlantic?
little Shelly asks,
handing it to me
as if in turn, a pearl
that's found *beneath,*
the odds of one-in-three,
the triptych of a guess.

I say I hear the traffic,
the road rage of the freeway,
the citiot on his jet skies
drowning waves. I'd set
a bad example if I lied,
feign I'm hard of hearing.

It's not far
till there's another, a crack
that runs along it like a
fault, a scar
from the shaking
of the earth. Her lips begin
to part as if some Moses
gave command,

used some driftwood
as a staff.

Her teeth will
gleam in the spot-
light of the sun, stop-
ping me in my steps.

She tells me that she
hears it once again—
this one's the Pacific!

adding that there's whale-
songs in the spiral,
that she knows they are
in love.

When my turn to listen
comes, there isn't a single
sound but for the gulls
above our heads. Squabbling
over food.

Before we find the third,
she'll urge me to *believe,*
like *wishing* on the evening
star, that I should twist my
tongue around, envision
we'll be rich

while she sells these ghostly
mollusks on the shore,
make enough
to buy a boat,
christen it after *mother,*
sail against the winds
that one day swept her
off her feet, her kerchief
waving madly like a flag.

Meteorology

We do nothing but
talk about the weather.
I know what you're thinking—
this is gonna be
a boring poem. Like discussion
done in piecemeal,
the silence between the
clouds—excruciating,
like the pause
between the tug and yank
of teeth.

I prefer it if it rains—
we have a trillion
drops of water from which
to choose, note most of them
are redundant—kerplunking
on the roadway, landing on our
rooves
like kamikazes.

You say the simile
is stupid, that I'm trying too hard

to sound so über-hip,
snarl the Japanese aren't
keen—on the use
of the triggering term.

I think you speak
of roofs, quote Dr. Johnson's
Dictionary, 1755:
In the plural
Sidney has rooves—
now obsolete.

Instead you counter *shingles:*
they're a pricey, pain in the
ass. I had them once as well.
Annoyed my mother called the
roofers, that I greeted them
at the door without my
clothes. That they fled on the sight
of me. This thing that looks like
measles
beneath a stodgy,
speechless sun.

Clickbait

News sites have become
a one-trick pony.

My friend in California
read The Big One's
Coming Soon—*Here's*
Why

causing her to
toss her Dodgers' tix:
front row, behind-the-
fucking plate,

and who *wouldn't*
want the reason that
any moment now,
the concrete
will be cascading
on their skull?

New Yorkers fare
no better: Rats Are
Winning the War

Inside Our Sewers—
Here's Why

as if the cause
will bring some comfort,
the pâtisserie on
Madison Ave—breathing a
bated *sigh* of much relief,
knowing the *basis*
why the vermin
are suddenly baked into
their scones, nibbling all the
seeds from every bagel,
their droppings
resembling pepper
juiced on steroids.

And it never-ever ends:

This Summer Will Sear Us
All—*Here's Why*

Trump Will Be Suspending
the Constitution—*Here's Why*

The World Will End
Tomorrow—*Here's Why*

My dear, headline
editor, I appreciate
your paper
needs the views,
that you're dependent
on our black cat
curiosity, our hanging
on your *why*
like it's the bottom of the
ninth—bases loaded,
full count,

the reliever with only
one pitch in his arsenal,
locked into his windup
like it's the final thing on
earth he'll ever throw.

Tatiana

For years it's been
a ritual, the unlading
of your cup, the flinging
to the ground around
your shoes—brittle,
cracked along the toes

like an auto with its wind-
shield in absentia,
the one through which he
flit like a jay
from a cannon, sprawled
upon the hood with
broken glass. The
pulsing before the dark.
When every bird is
tucked in gnarly trees.

It's been about ninety
months
since you've been touched.
With consent.
Even the pillbugs
know the difference.

You can see it how they
curl upon your nudge,

when love has been up-
ended at the dusk,
when the snails
have called it a
day, receding
in their spirals
like a phallus
after the deed,

by that peeling, forlorn
bench on which you're
slumped, a pigeon
feeding *you*
with every dreg &
crumb of seed.

The Savant

And Jesus said unto them, see ye not
all these things? Verily I say unto you,
there shall not be left here
one stone upon another.
—Matthew 24:2

Leon could only *do*
a single thing. An impresario
when it came to
canvas. Spotting the genius
from 100,000 works.
Saying one day
he would curate
an exhibit. Screaming
from the summit
of the roof, sliding down its
shingles, landing on his
ass above the eaves.

He could only ever hold
a solo brush.
His hand that quaked in
aftershock. To the big
one moments before.

But in the end
it did not matter.
His ground a-strewn
with stones. Likened
to a Temple
razed by Romans.
The scattering
of the Jews.

He painted,
while he stood on his
head on a stool. Counting
one one-thousand, two
one-thousand…
Claimed the mountain
had been stroked
while underwater.
That holding his breath
for hours
was the only gift
he had. We knew that
there were *others*
up his sleeve,

rolled up to the elbow
like a scroll.

But then he'd *lose*
that special term by which
he thrived, among the sneakers
tied but once, with bows the size
of mesas,

the sinless Windsor
knot he always wore,
fashioned
by his father
back in 1996:

Savant

One who knew us
better than our-
selves:
ashes to ashes,
stardust to star-
dust, you're only the
universe, y'know

and when he finally
showed us the portrait
of his mother,
gone since ’89,

damn, we’d never seen
anything like it,
his palette of
black-to-gold, this orb
of amber brilliance,
blinding us like a
god behind the
bush, one who
balanced the world,
spinning like a
ball way back in
Harlem—a common
trope (that’s true),
a-twirl upon her
finger like a top.

The Jingle

If you hear *easy-peasy*
one more time you'll scream.

It won't be the *usual* shriek
you give when you spot a mouse.
The way it squirms
beneath the fridge, squeezing
down its spine like
it's *made* of memory foam—
its tail a cut elastic—
thinking it's found a
shortcut to the crisper,
making you extra-queasy
at the thought.

We'll leave not a single
leaf unturned
in the search for *droppings.*
I say they're more likely
in the cavities of Swiss.
Like golf balls sunk at the mini-
putt. The one where we're always
over par. Especially the 18th hole,
where it says a *child*
could score it in three:

easy peasy, lemon squeezy

that saying used to go,
causing you to *grit* your pitted teeth,
at its grating condescension,
its annoying, sing-song rhyme,

clench your throbbing fists,
as if ready to take on the
bully, one who stole your
lunch;

discarding your cheese in the
rubbish; your envisioning
a Ben-like rodent
who would soon make a meal
out of it—

one which was strenuously
wrought, your mother at the
foundry, wiping off her forehead
in the steam, working every shift
until she dropped.

Ashkenazi

You noticed I bought a book
by Eli Bartmann. His tome of
Selected Poems. 88-hundred
pages.

Now there's a man who's
humble, remarking with a
sneer. I shrug it off at first

but *then* you make a beeline
for his tallit, in response to your
keffiyeh
that was worn throughout the
protest at which we marched
and gladly so.

He's a fucking Nazi,
hiding it in his prayers.
It's even there
in his ethnicity—
the AshkeNAZI.

Of course he is, my love,

I *think* but do not say.

I saw him at
Bar Mitzvahs, humming
Edelweiss, taking goosesteps
towards the knish.
Downing pretzels in the shape of
swastikas.

There's a town near Kirkland
Lake, who've proudly kept
their name: Swastika, Ontario.
They had it *years*
before Herr Hitler. Dubbed it
after their one-time
mine of gold.
Adding the Hindus carved it *first*
in all their temples.

I imagine my coup de grâce,
tell you Bartmann will be
there to give a reading.
Don a schirmmütze
on his head—in lieu of his
kippah. Bring Norman

Goldstein along, the man who
forges silver in spite of his
name. Six-million
Magen Davids. Swears
they sell like latkes
in Calcutta.

Charades

I mime a tender
cradling with my arms.
You counter
with a backward
slap to the air.
I stoop to tie
my shoe.
You fling yours
to the wall.

I tap my *shoulder*
with a flutter
of my hand.
Like *encouragement*
would. Like any
father should.
You grimace
like your tongue's
just tasted Kids
from the Sour Patch—
or evading in vain
the press of lips
on lips.

On the day of
your father's funeral,
one of us
has to mourn,
roll from our side
at the dawn,
prop ourselves up
with a pillow,

feign that we're
finally ready,
to step out
on the stage,
from behind the
shower's curtain,

as clouds
relinquish their grief,
globules
by the billions,

the rapping
of their water
on our roof,

like applause
from the freshly dead
who know they're not.

The Automaton

I'm asked at once
to confirm the fact
that *I am not a robot*

but I am.

I don't need to
wrestle with a CAPTCHA,
say how *many*
fucking squares
contain the form of
a juggling clown;

and who's to say
he isn't just a *poser,*
dropping the eggs
mere *seconds*
after this pic was
hurriedly snapped?

If I were *human,*
I wouldn't give a crap
about the man behind the
paint, the stupid scarlet
ball upon his nose,

the wig
that makes him look
ridiculous, an end-times
Phyllis Diller.

But because I'm made
of metal, I think about his
night that lies ahead,
washing all that *gunk*
from his miserable
face, the grin he's never
held past 6pm,
the single bed he
sleeps on—hard
as an iron *door,*
one that keeps him
barred from actually
living, a woman's
wispy touch and
sincere smile;
falling in *love*
like a man of flesh-and-
blood will often do,

if his chest contains a
heart instead of Intel,
the winding green of
veins in lieu of wires,

wondering *why*
he has to prove
he's truly human,
when he's *in*
the same position
I'm currently in,

that he's been hurt
so very often

they should sense
he's not a *robot*
from the salt of his misty
touch, the quiver
of his finger
on the mouse,

that he needn't
click a box to say
I'm real.

Tempo

The website says
this poem takes a *minute*
to read—well, if you're
an auctioneer, perhaps.

A poem is not
the climax of a thriller,
where Poirot
has solved the crime,
everything tied-
up in little bows.
It's not the ticker-
tape of stocks,
the scores that flash
from baseball's
night before,

and it's not an
Archie comic, the *duh* of
lumbering Moose,
Veronica's
shallow depth
compared to Betty,

the *laughs* behind
Mr. Weatherbee's
portly back.

But then Big Ethel
has *never* been loved,
sees her future
in old Miss Grundy,
unable to win the
heart of even *Jughead,*

losers in every
universe that there
is,

that when you *reach*
for the bottom rung
you come up *empty*—
in terms of love,
in terms of life,

in terms of a poem
you've read in only
60 seconds.

Why No One Ever Asks Me for a Blurb

I despise the word
blurb.
Its approximation
to *burp.*
Its truncated
BS
on the back,

of that book
you feigned was
great, essential,
this century's
masterpiece,
not the piece of
shit it really was.

I haven't got the
gumption
to tell it straight,
shooting at the centre
of the target,
felling the aspiring
poet in their hearth,

their flame
snuffed out at last,
never again
to inflict us
with their clumsy
prosody,
their incessant
démodé,
their farcing
the *quotidian.*

I confess
to my own
hypocrisy:

the blurbist's
constant usurping
of the stage,
the tossing of the
words in salad
bowls, without the *sting*
of vinaigrette,

the *look-at-me*
you fools
I'm surely
tempted to convey—
my praise
more poetic
than the *poetaster-*
disaster
within, embedded
like a landmine
between the covers.

So, my fellow bard,
ask me not
to laud your golden
verse, claim it's
even better
than your last,
worth *twice*
the price
of purchase,

say your rhyme of
"June" with "spoon"
is so clearly *innovative*—
in an *ironic*
sense, of course,
knowing the slurp
of every plaudit

cannot be ingested
with a fork,
a knife deliberately
dulled
on either side,
a utensil
in a month
that's not the sixth—

open to the grifting
of my guile,
my wanton flattery.

Noah, at St. Francis

With the most recent
tabulations
from the Department
of Global Poetry,
there are 685 billion, 278
million, 431 thousand,
294 poems about birds in
trees. Poems with only trees
and not a bird
have not been tallied.
Or, suffice to say, vice-
versa.

Today there was a
shelling in
Jabalya—a boy
without his hands. Today
there was another
missing girl. Her mother
ever-fretful
on Kettle Point. Today
Jacko ran the red
when you were shopping.

Your son will come and
visit as he grows. Writing
40 poems about the
wrens, who dart between the
branches every dawn.
Play *chicken* with the sun
when no one's looking. It never
leaves its path or ever
blinks. We find that
out the hard way.

Or maybe *someday*
in your gurney, on the way to
surgery, wrapped as if some
pharaoh from a tomb, he'll recite
a pair of couplets
when he's twelve,

one about the crow
which soars aloft;
a greening, sprouting
twig held in its
beak—

the other to say the
night has finally
fallen,

the flood has finally
ceased this time for
good.

for the doctor who took me out
of my mother's womb

Earthworms have no eyes,
but they do have light receptors
and can tell when they are
in the dark or in the light.
—*journeynorth.org*

A baby
never chooses
to be born.
That much
I can tell you.

If presented
with the option,
I would have
turned and
climbed the birth
canal—

if I'd seen
the copious
suffering
that awaited,

spreading
wide its talons,

seducing
like a salesman,
ever-willing
to beguile,

with the lie
of love and
life,

how much sorrow
you can take,

that you'll bounce
back like the
balls
in every
lottery there is,

the one
you'll never win,

like a worm
that arises
to the surface,

failing to
burrow back
into the earth,
be wise enough
to leave the world
behind,

leave the birds
behind,

proof
they weren't
sightless
to begin with,
that eyes
are not the only
way to see,

that they've learned
at last to snub
the falling rain,

this somber
convocant,

its call
in April
air,
its hoodwink
that it's here
to bathe them
clean.

The Sofa

The mother & child
reunion, is only
a moment away
—Paul Simon

It began as mere
haiku:

Scar in my center
Folded skin denoting loss
Birth's disconnection

Surely one-and-done

but then you showed me
yours—Parisian, 19th-
century velvet, bordered
with a curving chord of
wood along the top, winding
down its arms and to its
legs, more than enough
for two;

but all I saw were the
navels on which our backs
would come to rest, belly-
buttons galore,
all of which looked
alike, as if made
to hold a dime,

a mother & son
recollection,

you and I
untethered
in this moment
of our breath,
throbbing in its
middle
thump-by-thump.

Le Sablier

You're a very boring
person, Charlie Brown.
I get bored
just thinking how
boring you are.
—Lucy van Pelt

You greet me every
morning with a yawn.
Nothing personal,
you reply, when I ask
if I'm that dull.

They say when you get
old, your child-
hood *punishments*

become your late-life
goals:

Not going out at night.
In bed by 8pm.
Staying home to *read*
the Oxford Dictionary.

Ok, that last one's
just made up,
but in my case
it's actually true. And
I do it without the
guise of daily cross-
words. Wanna know
what *fester* really means?
If hourglass is a *single* or
compound word?
That watching it
might be fun, counting
all the grains
upon their fall?

You'd rather gape at
the paint—that's drying
in our kitchen, and
frankly so would I.
Waiting to see if
it bubbles. If it cracks
along the corner
behind the stove.

Like an egg that doesn't
split upon the tap—
holding back its yolk,
doing next-to-nothing.

If the painter
did a half-assed job.
Spend more time in our
fridge than wiping brushes.
Wolfing down the strudel
your mother left us—

many months ago.
Regardless that it's wizened.
Without a hint of apple
flavour. Like that poem
about the cactus, just sitting
in the desert
doing squat. Where Snoopy's
brother Spike
had dwelt alone.
Snapping up the ticket
while at last
he had the chance;

knowing poor ol'
Charlie Brown

was Indiana fucking
Jones compared to that.
A bloody tilt-a-whirl
compared to me. One that
up and launches
into *space,* in its breath-
taking, grand finale,

where there isn't a single
sound, nowhere else to
go except the moon,
where the craters
stay the same,
where a fireball
hasn't struck in
over three-and-a-
half billion years.

Iran

You've started to
scribble
the birth of a brand-
new poem,
refuse to let me see it,
saying *it's really rough.*

If it's about the dog, I
counter, then *it's really*
ruff-ruff.

No one pens a poem
about our dog.
Not you. Not me—
and no, this doesn't
count.

He's old, half-deaf, only
hearing the opening
of a can. He slumbers
23 hours, goes out
to do his business
and nothing more.

There's little
to make a poem,
that will put me
to sleep *myself.*

You reveal it's
"Khorramābād," about a
kitten who was found
beneath the rubble—
more chalk
than tufts of fur.
Her faintest hint of mew—
heard above the hammer
of the jack, that the boy
who loved her cried,
more than for his
parents—

their scarlet, broken
limbs; the wrappings on
their heads just
like a turban;

while our dog
will shift on his
side, eyeballs *rolling*
below his lids

like they're marbles
under rugs, maybe
woven *Persian,*
like the one on which
he whimpers,
playing the *hero*
in every dream
that stays unwritten.

Aspalathus Linearis

I bring your morning
tea upon a tray.
Having finally
mastered the art
of never-spilling, cup
and saucer stilled—

not a single
drop to fall, like a petal
past its prime,
from a flower
born to fail, clenched
within my grasp
as though denial—
of its gradual, creeping
fade, its ability to
remember its name:

for better and
for worse—
there's no *or*
amid this love
I hold for you—

one hand
clutching a rose,
by the green
of its immaculate
stem: smooth, serene,
not a scratch
upon my palm;

the other just the
thorns, fingers
seeping blood,
like *Rooibos*
in a chalice, some
saviour's *sacrifice.*

Nine

There's a beauty to our numbers
that I note with admiration:

the shape of cipher 6
and its curving, crescent close;

8, with its weaving, double loop
that skaters strive and scratch to mimic;

3, and its ability to complete,
to divide as trilogy, to *manifest*
as Trinity;

1 which finds the wholeness
in *itself,* never wishing to *flee*
its core or essence,
for the sake of multiplying:

One times one times one
will always equal one.

2 is the sum of love,
the most romantic of all our digits,

and in terms of teaching math,
it gives a break to all our children:

Two times two is four,
and the answer's the same
when adding.

7 is Biblical,
the week for God's creation,
the length of telling tales
of *Harry Potter,* of *Narnia,*
the complement of 12.

5, the Books of Moses,
the fingers and thumb
on our hands,
giving us ability,
the gift of grasp
and molding, making shapes
from slabs of clay.

4, a pair of couplets,
the voice of poems
and song, the rhythm
and march of the saints.

Yet when I come to number 9,
my spirit starts to sink:

it has such *lofty* expectations,
aspiring to reach new levels,
only to fall so painfully short—

missing the mark of 10
by just a meagre, single stroke;
always being known for
"almost there,"
remembered for the glory
it could have gained
but never got,
its cousins—19, 49, 69—
bearing the brunt
of all its failings.

99 is but a stepping stone,
a grating *lapse* towards 100,
a number we only *watch* while it rolls,
a humble *countdown* to celebration,
unable to give us merit on its own.

I spent all of ’99
yearning for 2000,
anticipating a new millennium,

the fears, excitement
we thought awaited us
in a dawning, changing world,
never enjoying the year for what it was,
practicing the writing
of an exotic date—

January 1, 2000

and eager to see
the masthead of that early morning paper,

ridding myself of the nines
that only accentuate defeat,

thinking I’ll *pass* some kind of threshold,
a singing, flowered archway
bidding *come, enter,*
leave what troubles you
behind.

The Year That Doesn't Count

William of Toronto
passed away at 92.
In reality, a
mathematician
would have said at
93—the wisdom of
rounding
92.9973
to the nearest bloody
digit.

His birthday was just
a single movie away,
Ferris Bueller's Day Off,
timed to the stroke of
Midnight—at his Ontario
nursing home. One where
half the folks sit in their
diapers, full-circle
from the day that they were
born.

But alas, 92 years, 364 days,
7 hours and 18 minutes
is still just 92. The mortician
who shared the obit
had conveyed that cruel
statistic.

In the year that doesn't
count, *Billy*—his friends &
neighbours called him—
ascended Machu Picchu
in 40 minutes;
did a trio of
three-sixties
on a rented, wooden
skateboard; jet-skied
in Hawaii
with the sharks—
did a cartwheel
in Kīlauea,
angered all the gods.

He lived the
year that doesn't count
right to the *brim,*
did it all in his
bare feet, wanting to
feel the ground against
his being—even if it cut,
even if it burned,
even if it splintered,

knowing he had very
little time in which to *feel,*
to bleed, to run back to the
party that never was, blow
out every candle—especially
the last—to prove he was really
here.

The moment he stopped
his breathing, it was his day
of birth in *Auckland,*

which happened to
coincide with
January 1st. Some will say
the fireworks
were for Billy. That New
Zealanders
gave him that *final* celebration
he'd never have.
That his spirit
can be seen among the
kiwis, his initials
on a tree

that bears its fruit
on New Year's Eve,
no matter how
out-of-season
it may be.

Gavrilo Princip and the Gift
that Keeps on Giving

You can thank *Gavrilo*
for your existence.
And this Serbian's
piercing shot.
I should really
give credit
to his mother.

Marija lost *six*
of her sickly children
in *infancy.* But not Gavrilo.
Sometimes the *odds* work
in your favour,
in ways we never fathom.
Like microbes
on a comet
made of ice,

one that strikes a planet—
which would other-
wise just stay dead.
But that was the Archean,

and we're discussing the
assassin—of Archduke
Ferdinand.

They say his father *Petar*
never cussed, imbibed the
numb of booze. Maybe Gavrilo
would have been kinder,
much less bitter
if he had. Being forced
by his farmer-father
to hold it in.
Serenity fucking now.

Speaking of the farms,
they're *where*
his parents met. He gave her his
head of lettuce. She
offered him some flagon
of the cow.
It was the first time
in a decade
it wasn't sour.

They say
she'd won his heart
that very day.
Probability
can work its wonders
when it wants.

I watch *dominoes*
digging trenches in
Passchendaele.
Become a laurel
for Jesse Owens in Berlin.
And there in Bergen-
Belsen, mutate to the typhus—
which failed to show some mercy
to the Franks.

Every face there *is*

might very well
never *be*
without the bullet.
At least in its present form.

I think of
Anne Frank's *journal*—her last
in a series of seven; bopping
along to Richard Starkey's
band in '64, the year I
would have been born.
She wrote they were called
The Heifers,

had some singer named Mickey
Jagger,

guzzling down the milk
as though it were pints
of frothing beer,
thinking *fuck it* all the while,
my life is going nowhere
really fast.

Symmetry

Your child asks,
why do we have
an extra eye
but not an extra
nose?

The second serves
as spare, I answer,
though not quite
accurately.

We've a pair of
hands and feet.
Ensuring our survival
should one of them be lost
or come to fail.

As for that additional
nose, we would lose
our equilibrium,
our visage
gone askew;

we wouldn't
survive the smell of
rotten eggs, a johnny-
on-the-spot that's run
amok.

Your moppet
is unfazed: *what about
our mouth?*

I respond in a way
that will cease these
silly questions—

an extra mouth
would inflate our
dental bills, double our root
canals,

cause us to cup our ears—
at the *chaos*
of conversation,

voices like a match
of table tennis, bouncing
here and there, the ping
and pong of madness,
when it's better not to
speak & only listen:

to the splash of
creek on stone,
the sparrow
in its bush
and spilling tears,
shed from both its
ducts, its mate upon the
ground with broken
wing, the other still
a-flutter, stretching in
its hell to reach the sky.

March

You say I'm
like a lion
out the gate—bursting
forth with poems,
all of them absurd.

No one's
gonna read them
and you're right,
there are *better*
things to do
within this month,
that isn't even
certain
of its season:

Winter's final
gnash, his claws
and roar of fury,
let me give a
chuckle
as you fall upon
the ice upon your
ass,

or the siren
which is Spring,
her breath from
southern waves,
the snowdrops
with their ruse of
appellation, the tease of
am I here?

So I will play the
coward, bleating
like a lamb, spilling all the
ink that's in its
bottle,

grind my stylus
on my blotter—
as out-of-date as I—

as if I plunged
down from the sky
of '39,

on my way to *skip*
along to Oz,

a friend on either side,

tailing Judy Garland
and her shoes, a bloody
shade of ruby
on these deceptive
bricks of gold.

Paris

This one is not so Grand
as its river, no Seine
cutting at its heart
or couples arm-in-arm
amid *je t'aime.*

We can see
the eroding townscape
from this crowded
rooftop bistro,
and there's a soufflé
on the menu you'd like to try,
while I scan the varied wine list
for *Château Valfontaine.*

We made a *hard,* last-minute
turn off the 403, figured
Brantford would be dull,
there's only so much
Bell and Gretzky
we can digest, yet again.

And substituting for a tower?
There's the truss bridge
serving the railway
that traverses the muddy banks,
its lattice now a respite
for a dozen, migrating flocks,

and, upon which, the locals say,
some have confessed their love;
plunged down in *ultime liberté.*

A Secondhand Game of Chance

I've never been
adept
at games of chance,
the craps or craps
of dice,

no taste of
seven's luck,
someone else's
Bingo!
in my ears—the swirl
of secondhand
smoke, coughing my days
away.

The odds are one-
in-twelve
I'll win at cancer.
6 is my digit
of choice.
If it's good enough
for God, it's good
enough for me.

And please don't get me
started—on those "random"
lotto balls, cavorting
in mid-air, the ones which know
my numbers, twirl
the final second
so I'll lose.

Or the times I'm
plucking petals
as I go, a judgement
of *daffodils,*

an outcome
that they've fixed
just like the spin of
Russian roulette:

She loves me
She loves me
She loves me

not not not not not

Magic

The final line of this
poem no longer
exists. It was surely there
for the taking, its fingernails
clutching rock, at the
top of a ragged *cliff*
from which it hung,
a *Wile E. Coyote*
in the making.

This poem's closing line
is a bar of *soap*
in a steamy shower,
pushed *away* from my
hand by its slime,
ready to trip me up
the moment it falls,
my eyes shut tightly
from the suds of cheap
shampoo, its lie of
no more tears.

The final line of this
poem is a cheeky *kid*
playing hide-and-seek,
concealed behind the
curtains, waiting for me
to open—

then disappear
like David Blaine.

Dear darling of a
brat, I promise not to
harm, will only *borrow*
what I need to make this
grand, let you vanish
in the air

once I've wrenched you
from my hat
by your fluffy ears.

You Ask for a Happy Ending

and I give you this:

it's Gordon Ramsey
saying that *it's ok,*
you tried your best;
when the wellington
is raw
and the patrons
up and leave;

it's the MAGA
unloading their guns,
hugging Mexicans
who *jump*
the Rio Grande;

it's Trump
resigning the
Presidency, selling
all his assets
and giving billions
to every women's
shelter in sight;

it's Israelis
singing the songs of
Palestine,
vacating the
West Bank,
rebuilding
the homes in Gaza
and *reusing*
their deadly drones
to deliver food;

while Kim Jong Un
takes a good long
look in the mirror,
decides to spike his
hair, donning a
rainbow shirt
while giving *Vladimir*
a call, asking him
to call off
all his soldiers,
beg Zelenskyy
for forgiveness,
offer trillions
in reparations;

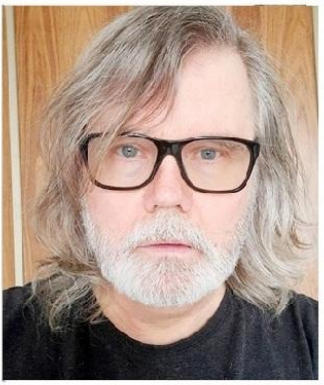
and in an alley
of urban blight,
Bezos carries beggars
to his mansion,
Elon giving chase,

offering rocket trips
to space—
free of charge,

saying love has
never looked better
from our wild, blue
yonder.

C-FZXP

Andreas Gripp was born and raised in Treaty 6 Territory (London, Ontario) and in 2024 relocated to Leamington with his wife, Carrie. He's the author of over 30 books of poetry, including *Clocking the Equus: Poems Selected and New* (2025). His poems have been praised for their lyrical and literary merit, accessibility, and for their blend of comic and poignant storytelling.



A long-time Londoner, Andreas Gripp now lives in Essex County along the shores of Lake Erie with his wife, Carrie. He has written over 30 books of poetry. His poems are inspired by the contemporary experiences of both common & uncommon people.

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-Richard-Yves Sitoski, Owen Sound Poet Laureate Emeritus

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